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in Africa

Sentrum vir Asiatiese Studies in Afrika
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Call for Participants

INSURGENT DEMOCRACIES IN ASIA AND AFRICA

A DOCTORAL COURSE

May 19-21, 2025

University of Pretoria

Across the globe, political trajectories in the early twenty-first century are defined by the turbulent intersection between elite-driven autocratization and democratic struggles from below. On the one hand, governing elites preside over highly consequential authoritarian turns, which erode democratic processes and institutions, constrain civil society and quell dissent, and jeopardize the hard-won rights of oppressed groups and vulnerable minorities. On the other hand, social movements have organized and mobilized to push back against authoritarianism, reclaim democratic rights, and reimagine the meanings and practices of democracy – often from the margins of social and political orders.

Asia and Africa are no exceptions from this pattern. From the 2010s and into the 2020s, both continents have witnessed democratic decline at the hands of elected leaders, but these processes have in turn been vigorously contested through waves of popular protest. Recent uprisings in Hong Kong, Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and South Korea testify to the vitality of democratic protests in the Asian context. Similarly, struggles for democracy have been a core impulse in Africa's current political life, from Tunisia and Egypt in the early 2010s, via South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Ethiopia towards the end of the decade, to Senegal, Kenya, and Mozambique in recent years.

It is these democratic struggles from below that are the core focus of the doctoral course *Insurgent Democracies in Asia and Africa*, which is being organized jointly by the Centre for Asian Studies in Africa (CASA) and the Innovation Foundation for Democracy from May 28 to May 30 at the University of Pretoria. Aimed at doctoral students whose research focuses on social movements and popular protests that mobilize to reclaim and reimagine democracy against autocratization in Asia and Africa, the doctoral course will provide a space for discussing and developing written work, learning from established scholars in the field, and acquiring essential academic skills. Some of the key questions to be explored are as follows:

- How do citizens and movements contest autocratization, and to what extent do democratic struggles from below succeed or fail in meeting their objectives?
- What are the central claims and demands at the core of popular struggles for democracy, and how do these evolve and change over time?
- Who are the central social forces in movements for democracy and democratic rights, and specifically, what roles do oppressed and exploited groups and vulnerable minorities play in democratic protests?
- How and to what extent is democracy reimagined in the collective action of insurgent citizens in ways that transcend the boundaries of current forms of government and representation? What does such reimagining signify for the future of democracy in Asia and Africa?

Across three days, participants in the doctoral course will be provided the opportunity to present and receive feedback on draft papers based on their research, attend lectures by scholars specializing in the study of democracy and contentious politics in Asia and Africa, and take part in training sessions focused on academic writing and publishing. Participants will also be invited to develop their draft papers into full articles for inclusion in a special issue of a relevant academic journal based on the proceedings of the doctoral course.

Convenor: Prof Alf Gunvald Nilsen (CASA director, Centre for Asian Studies in Africa)

Number of participants: 10 (Priority will be given to doctoral students based at Asian and African universities)

Financial support: The Innovation Foundation for Democracy and CASA will cover costs for travel, accommodation, and subsistence for all participants.

Deadline for applications: 1 March 2025

Doctoral students interested in applying to the doctoral course should submit the following documents:

- A cover letter expressing your motivation for participation, an outline of your doctoral research topic, and details about the stage of your doctoral research. The letter should also detail your institutional affiliation and supervisor's contact details.
- A 500-word abstract for the paper to be presented at the doctoral course, plus information about any previous experience with publishing in academic journals.

Applications should be e-mailed to Alf.Nilsen@up.ac.za by 1 March 2025.